



## Basic Grips and Positions for Beginning Sports Acrobatics

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As the newest discipline to USA Gymnastics, sports acrobatics is on the rise in gyms around the country. This article is designed for coaches who are interested in introducing sports acrobatics into their kindergym and recreational programs as well as coaches who are interested in starting a competitive sports acrobatics program.

The following are basic positions that are used primarily for pairs. Pairs should train first and then introduce groups once the basics have been covered and mastered. The following balance and tempo holds are important for athletes to learn correctly early in their sports acrobatics career.

Spotting sports acrobatics skills is much the same as any other gymnastics skills. Coaches need to be aware that the base partner is in many ways an additional spotter. It is important for coaches to help young bases understand how they can help keep their partner safe. The base partner has a responsibility for the safety of their top and they need to be aware of this.

For this article both partners will be female, however, these skills can be used for male and female combination of partners as well.

### Front Bird Position

This skill is used as a basic skill at Level 5. The body position of the top is a precursor to many upper level skills. The base bends her knees and puts her hands on the hips of the top, with at least one finger and thumb on top's belly. The top bends her knees and with her hands on the base's shoulders, jumps. The base straightens her legs while lifting the top over her head and finishing with straight arms. The top lifts her chest and legs to a "superman" position, with arms in a "T". The base balances by using fingers and wrists to maintain a horizontal position of top.

The spotter for a front bird should stand perpendicular to the base. With one hand on the lower rib cage of the top and one hand on the top's thigh the spotter should help the base lift the top and help maintain balance. The spotter should be aware of the risk of the top falling over the back of the base and spot accordingly.

### Progressions of Front Bird

- The top can lie on floor and lift her chest and legs up so that only hips and stomach are on floor. The legs should be straight and together. This is the basic front bird position and is important for any acrobat to master.
- The top does the same on a narrow block or balance beam.
- The top does a bird position on the feet of base laying on back ("superman"). The top and base can start holding hands and work towards letting go.

- The top does a bird position on the hands of base with the top starting on a stack of mats to help the base lift her.
- The top does a bird position starting from the floor.
- A spotter should always be used in the beginning stag



## Regular Hand to Hand Grip

A regular handgrip is used for many lower level skills that progress into more difficult skills at the higher levels. This grip is essential to the successful completion of skills!

The base lays on her back with her arms up, perpendicular to the floor. The top stands by the base's head. The top reaches for the bases hands. Both partners' first two fingers point down the wrist of their partner. The thumbs and second two fingers wrap around her partner's hand. The hands of the base should be at a 45-degree angle. The grip should be tight. Remind both partners to squeeze their hands. This will make the grip more stable. The top should put pressure on the front of her palm. If the top puts too much pressure on the heel of her hand, the grip is likely to be "flat" and insecure.



## Progressions of Hand to Hand Skills

- The top does tuck, straddle, and pike on blocks, a balance beam, parallel bars or the floor.
- The top does regular handgrip with the base on her back. The top puts pressure on her hands and tries to move base's hands pointed, flat, in and out (wrist wars). The base should also do the same to the top's grip.
- The top does tuck, straddle, and pike with the base on her back.
- The top does tuck, straddle, and pike with base standing up. A spotter should be ready to help the top land.

## Toe Pitch Position

The base stands with her feet shoulder width apart and bends her knees keeping her back straight and her shoulders back. The base's hands are overlapped with the backs of her hands resting on her thighs just above

her knees. Her top hand holds the top's foot (right or left) of top with two fingers pointing up the heel and with the ball of the top's foot in the palm of the base's hand. The base's bottom hand gives support. A coach needs to consider which hand the base puts on top. If the top steps in with her right foot, the base needs to have the right hand on top. This will enable progressions to higher-level skills. The top should place her hands on the shoulders of the base. Once the pair progresses to a straight jump, the top should be instructed to push down on the base's shoulders while stepping up onto the base's hands.

For a stretch jump a spotter can stand directly behind the top. Once the pair progresses to higher level skills, the spotter will need to be perpendicular to the athletes.

## Progressions of Toe Pitch Straight Jump

- The top steps up onto a block with her arms by her ears and with her body tight. The top should be able to balance standing on her dominant foot. In this drill, the block becomes the base.
- The base sits on the corner of a low block with knees together, and her hands in toe pitch position resting on her knees. Top steps into hands of base. Holding onto base's shoulders, top sets up and does a one-foot balance.
- The base stands in a toe pitch position. The top steps into the hands of the base and, holding onto base's shoulders, steps up and balances on one foot. This skill does not include flight.
- The base stands in a toe pitch position. The top steps up and pushes off of the base's shoulders while jumping up and slightly back to land on her feet on the floor as close to base as possible. The base gives little or no push and catches the top's arms on the landing.
- The base progressively gives a push starting with her legs straightening and then with her arms lifting up and close to her body. Safe, sturdy landing of the top is most important.



## Handstand on Knee

The handstand on knee is the most basic of the sports acrobaticshandstands. Mastery of this skill is essential for progression in sports acrobatics.

The base lunges with her dominant leg in front and as close to parallel to the floor as possible. The top stands by the base's side and places her hands on the bases thigh close to her knee. The top's hands should be one in front of the other. The hand closest to the base should be behind her other hand. The base grips the top's hips and helps as she jumps through a tuck position to a handstand.

## Progressions of Handstand on Knee Skills

- The top does handstands on the floor and blocks.
- The top does a handstand with the base on two knees sitting on her own feet. In this skill the top will have one hand on each of the base's thighs.
- The top does a handstand with the base kneeling on one knee. Now the top has both of her hands on one of the base's thighs as described above.



- The top does a handstand with the base in a lunge.
- The top can work on one arm handstand, arch position, or the base may go to one arm or free.

## Regular Foot to Hand Grip

A regular foot grip is used for many lower level skills that progress into more difficult skills at the higher levels. This grip is essential to the successful completion of skills!

The base lays on her back with her arms next to her ears, on the floor. The top stands by the base's head, and steps into the base's hands. The ball of the top's foot should be resting in the palm of the bases hand. The base should have her first two fingers along the bottom of the top's foot. The other fingers and thumb should wrap around the top's foot. The top needs to keep her weight over the balls of her feet at all times. The base should raise her feet for the top to grab. As the top jumps, the base pushes her arms straight and perpendicular to the floor. The top will need to bend at the waist to keep holding on to the base's feet.

## Progressions of Foot to Hand Skills

- The top releases one and then both hands. The top should stand up straight in a salute position.
- The top puts weight on one foot while the base releases one foot. While working towards this, the base may use two hands to support the top's one foot.
- The top does arabesque and attitude positions.
- The base kneels. For this skill the top will begin standing on the base's shoulders then steps into the base's hands.
- The base will begin by keeping her hands directly in front of her shoulders.
- The base stands. The above progressions will also work with the base standing. Eventually high-level athletes work with the top on the bases straight arms while standing.



I hope that these basic skills will help you get started with sports acrobatics in your gym! The sports acrobatics program also currently has a "10 Basic Skills" video available through USAG Member Services (1-800-345-4719).

For more information about starting a sports acrobatics program, please check out the sports acrobatics web page at [www.usa-gymnastics.org/acro/](http://www.usa-gymnastics.org/acro/) or contact the sports acrobatics program at 317-829-5667.

